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Item 6 of the provisional agenda
Research and systematic observation

Summary information on enhanced availability and visibility of scientific information relevant to the Convention on the UNFCCC website

Note by the secretariat

Summary

The Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA), at its thirty-eighth session, noted that the availability and visibility of scientific information relevant to the needs of the Convention on the UNFCCC website has been enhanced, and requested the secretariat to provide a summary report on that work and to make it available for consideration at SBSTA 40. Prepared in response to that mandate, this document provides an overview of the actions undertaken by the secretariat to enhance the availability and visibility of scientific information relevant to the Convention on the UNFCCC website, in particular by providing a detailed description and analysis of the use of the redesigned web page on science, research and systematic observation, as well as of other online tools used by the secretariat to that end. It concludes with an outline of possible next steps that could be taken to further enhance the availability and visibility of scientific information on the UNFCCC website.

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I. Introduction

A. Mandate

1. The Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA), at its thirty-eighth session, recalled its conclusions from SBSTA 32, 34 and 35 and noted that the availability and visibility of scientific information relevant to the needs of the Convention on the UNFCCC website has been enhanced. It requested the secretariat to provide a summary report on that work and to make it available for consideration at SBSTA 40.[1]

B. Scope of the note

2. This document has been prepared in response to the mandate referred to in paragraph 1 above. It draws on the information available on the UNFCCC website related to science, research and systematic observation, and details other online tools used by the secretariat to communicate information on climate science.

C. Possible action by the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice

3. The SBSTA may wish to consider the information contained herein at its fortieth session as part of its consideration of matters related to research and to determine any further action arising therefrom.

D. Background

4. The Conference of the Parties (COP), by decision 9/CP.11, requested the SBSTA to regularly consider research needs and systematic observation relating to the Convention in order to inform Parties about the ongoing and planned activities of regional and international climate change research programmes and to communicate Parties' views on research needs and priorities to the scientific community, as necessary.

5. SBSTA 26 agreed to develop and maintain a dialogue between Parties and research programmes and organizations in the context of decision 9/CP.11 (hereinafter referred to as the research dialogue) and invited relevant research programmes and organizations to regularly inform the SBSTA of developments in research activities relevant to the needs of the Convention.[2]

6. SBSTA 30 requested the secretariat to make the presentations given as part of the research dialogue available on the UNFCCC website in such a way that they can be reached by a wide audience.[3] SBSTA 32 also requested the secretariat to consider ways to make available on the UNFCCC website information from research programmes and organizations.[4]

7. SBSTA 34 further requested the secretariat, subject to the availability of resources, to continue to support the research dialogue, including by enhancing the visibility of

[1] FCCC/SBSTA/2013/3, paragraph 69.
[2] FCCC/SBSTA/2007/4, paragraphs 44 and 47.
[3] FCCC/SBSTA/2009/3, paragraph 48.
[4] FCCC/SBSTA/2010/6, paragraph 49(b).

scientific information of relevance to the Convention on the UNFCCC website, including the provision of a calendar of key science-policy meetings in collaboration with research programmes and organizations and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).[5]

8. In addition, SBSTA 35 requested the secretariat, taking into consideration information from relevant research programmes and organizations and the IPCC, to further enhance the availability and visibility of scientific information relevant to the Convention on the UNFCCC website, including through webcasts of the proceedings of any workshops conducted under the research dialogue.[6]

9. Finally, SBSTA 38 recalled its conclusions from SBSTA 32, 34 and 35, noted that the availability and visibility of scientific information relevant to the needs of the Convention on the UNFCCC website has been enhanced, and requested the secretariat to provide the summary report referred to in paragraph 1 above.

II. Actions undertaken to enhance the availability and visibility of scientific information relevant to the Convention on the UNFCCC website

10. In response to the requests made by the SBSTA referred to in paragraphs 6 and 7 above, the secretariat undertook the following actions:

(a) Made available all presentations given as part of the research dialogue on the research pages of the UNFCCC website;[7]

(b) Developed and updated a calendar of key science-policy meetings in collaboration with research programmes and organizations and the IPCC;[8]

(c) Webcast the proceedings of the research dialogue, when possible;[9]

(d) Redesigned the science-related web page of the UNFCCC website in order to better integrate it with the rest of the website and to simplify access to scientific information. The redesigned web page came online on 22 May 2013.

11. The redesigned science web page can be accessed from the left-hand side navigation menu of the UNFCCC website, where a new menu on science has been created. The science web page groups together matters relating to research, systematic observation and the 2013–2015 review. A submenu on science can also be found under the menu on essential background. Chapter II.A below describes the structure of the science web page and presents a brief analysis of its use (see figure 1).

A. Redesign of the science web page of the UNFCCC website

12. The science web page of the UNFCCC website[10] is structured around four main sections, namely workstreams, knowledge resources, workshops and meetings, and decisions and conclusions. The redesign of the web page consisted in improving its graphic design to make it consistent with the style used for the web page on adaptation. The new

[5] FCCC/SBSTA/2011/2, paragraph 55(b).
[6] FCCC/SBSTA/2011/5, paragraph 42.
[7] <http://unfccc.int/7524.php>.
[8] Available at <http://unfccc.int/6562.php>.
[9] See, for example, <http://unfccc.int/6044.php>.
[10] <http://unfccc.int/ 6990.php>.

web page features pictures illustrating each subsection, and the structure of the page is clearly represented by various boxes with links to the subsections.

13. The redesign also consisted in clustering the information available according to three science-related workstreams, namely research, systematic observation and the 2013–2015 review. Visitors now have facilitated access to all relevant submissions from Parties, presentations, webcasts, decisions and conclusions and meeting information available under each workstream. Furthermore, navigation in and out of the four sections of the science web page is facilitated both by breadcrumbs that appear horizontally across the top of the web pages and by a drop-down menu of the four sections, which is available on the left-hand side of all of the web pages. The new organization of the information by workstream and the facilitated navigation contribute to the enhanced availability and visibility of scientific climate change information on the UNFCCC website. Below is a description of all of the sections of the science web page and their use.

14. The science web page is regularly updated to include relevant documents and information as they become available.

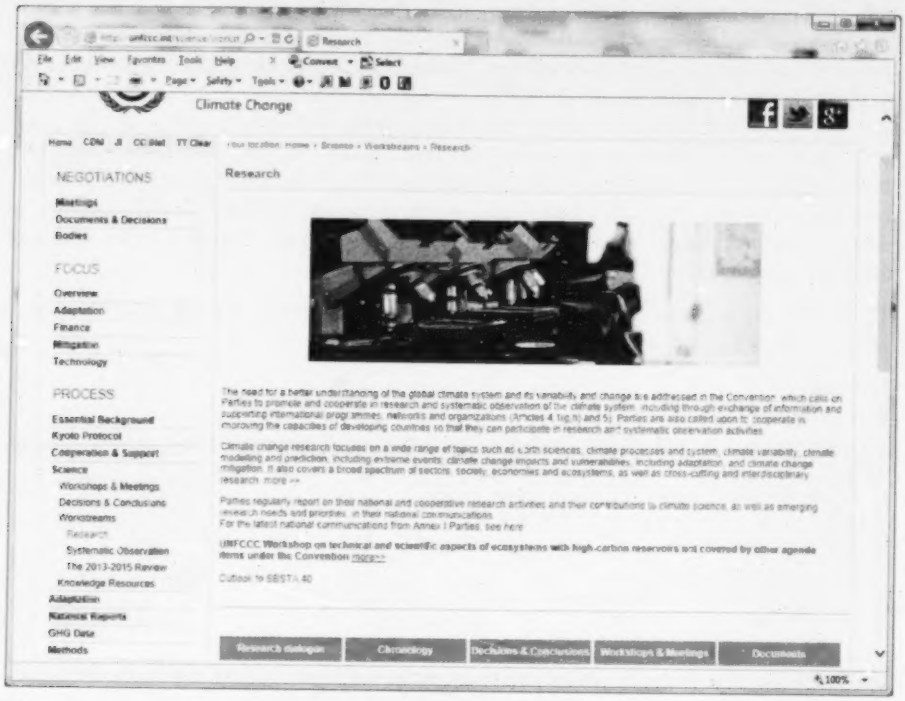
Figure 1
Screenshot of the science web page

1. Workstreams

15. The workstreams section is divided into three subsections on research, systematic observation and the 2013–2015 review.

Research

Figure 2
Screenshot of the research web page



16. The subsection on research[11] provides background information on climate change research and a link to the latest national communications from Parties included in Annex I to the Convention (Annex I Parties). It also features information on the annual research dialogue, the aim of which is to inform Parties about ongoing and planned activities of regional and international research programmes and organizations active in climate change research and to communicate Parties' views on research needs and priorities to the scientific community, in particular to relevant research programmes and organizations and the IPCC (see figure 2).

17. The page on research contains links to: a dedicated web page on the research dialogue; a chronology of events organized by the secretariat at which research was addressed, including sessions of the SBSTA, meetings of the research dialogue, side events and workshops; decisions and conclusions addressing research; a list of workshops and meetings on research and the research dialogue, with links to the meetings' web pages; and a list of documents, including notes by the secretariat and submissions from Parties and observer organizations, addressing the topics of the various meetings of the research dialogue and research relevant to the needs of the Convention.

18. The dedicated web page on the research dialogue includes presentations made, meeting agendas, summaries by the Chair of the SBSTA, webcasts of events and the submissions made by Parties ahead of each meeting suggesting topics to be considered under the research dialogue.

19. The research workshops held in the context of the research dialogue provide an opportunity for in-depth consideration of the topics addressed under the dialogue. The page

[11] <http://unfccc.int/3461.php>.

on those workshops includes links to the presentations, background documents and materials made available for the events, including scientific papers provided by participants.

20. The SBSTA addresses research at its first sessional period of the year and systematic observation at its second sessional period of the year. During the first half of the year, therefore, the research subsection contains an outlook for the first session of the SBSTA, highlighting key research items and documents to be discussed. During the second half of the year, the research subsection refers to the latest conclusions of the SBSTA on the relevant agenda item.

21. Before the redesign, the research subsection of the science web page received 817 hits (in March 2012), while after the redesign, that figure was 618 (in March 2014). Over the past 12 months, the page has received an average of 818 hits per month.

Systematic observation

22. The subsection on systematic observation[12] points to relevant Articles of the Convention and decisions taken, and features a link to the latest national communications from Annex I Parties, which include information on global climate change observing systems.

23. The structure of the subsection on systematic observation mirrors that on research and includes: a chronology of events at which systematic observation was addressed, including various sessions of the COP, the SBSTA and the Subsidiary Body for Implementation (SBI), as well as side events, with links to relevant submissions from Parties and observer organizations and conclusions and decisions adopted; a list of conclusions of the SBSTA, the SBI and the COP, as well as decisions of the COP, addressing systematic observation; a section on workshops and meetings, with a description of two side events on systematic observation and links to the events' web pages; and a list of documents of the SBSTA, the SBI and the COP on systematic observation.

24. As noted in paragraph 20 above, the SBSTA addresses research at its first sessional period of the year and systematic observation at its second sessional period. The systematic observation subsection, therefore, refers to the latest conclusions of the SBSTA on the relevant agenda item during the first half of the year. During the second half, the page contains an outlook for the second session of the SBSTA, highlighting key systematic observation related issues and documents to be discussed.

25. Before the redesign, the systematic observation subsection of the science web page received 641 hits (in March 2012), while after the redesign, that figure was 487 (in March 2014). Over the past 12 months, the page has received an average of 791 hits per month.

The 2013–2015 review

26. The subsection on the 2013–2015 review[13] provides an introduction to the issue and features links to the following information: a question-and-answer section, clarifying the procedures involved in the conduct of the 2013–2015 review; information material to be considered under the review, including the IPCC assessment reports; and Parties' submissions, containing their views on the 2013–2015 review.

27. The subsection also links to a dedicated page on the structured expert dialogue on the 2013–2015 review, which features a detailed description of its two meetings held so far,

[12] <http://unfccc.int/ 3462.php>.
[13] <http://unfccc.int/6998.php>.

with links to submissions from Parties, presentations, agendas, summaries and other background documents, as well as soundtrack recordings of the meetings.

28. The rest of the web page is structured in a similar way to the web pages for the other two workstreams and includes: a chronology of the 2013–2015 review; a list of decisions of the COP and conclusions of the SBSTA and the SBI relating to the 2013–2015 review; a section on workshops and meetings, with links to the pages of the two meetings of the structured expert dialogue, held in June 2013 and November 2013; and a section on documents, with links to documents relevant to the 2013–2015 review.

29. The web page also includes an outlook for the next session of the SBSTA, with a description of the discussions to be held on the 2013–2015 review.

30. The subsection on the 2013–2015 review of the science web page received 742 hits in September 2013 and 445 hits in March 2014. Over the past 10 months, the page has received an average of 667 hits, with a peak of 1,579 hits in November 2013, coinciding with COP 19 and the 2nd meeting of the structured expert dialogue.

31. The web pages for the three workstreams feature two common elements, namely: a list of links to external resources, including the IPCC and its assessment reports, as well as other external organizations that carry out work related to research or systematic observation; and a calendar of upcoming worldwide climate change science and research related events organized by external organizations, including on issues related to systematic observation.

2. Decisions and conclusions

32. The decisions and conclusions section[14] is organized according to the three workstreams of the science web page of the UNFCCC website, namely research, systematic observation and the 2013–2015 review:

(a) For research, it lists and provides access to decisions of the COP taken since 2005, as well as conclusions of the SBSTA and the COP adopted since 2000, with an indication of the pages on which research is addressed;

(b) For systematic observation, it lists decisions of the COP taken since 1997, and conclusions of the COP, the SBSTA and the SBI adopted since 1999, with an indication of the pages on which systematic observation is addressed;

(c) For the 2013–2015 review, it lists decisions of the COP taken since 2010, and conclusions of the SBSTA and the SBI adopted in 2013, with an indication of the pages on which the 2013–2015 review is addressed.

33. The section on decisions and conclusions is updated after each sessional period of the year to include links to the relevant outcomes of the session.

3. Workshops and meetings

34. The section on workshops and meetings[15] is also organized according to the three workstreams of research, systematic observation and the 2013–2015 review:

(a) For research, it lists the various meetings of the research dialogue, side events on climate change research and research needs, and workshops and informal discussions held since May 2006, with links to the web pages of the events;

[14] <http://unfccc.int/ 7559.php>.
[15] <http://unfccc.int/ 7524.php>.

(b) For systematic observation, it lists two relevant side events, held in December 2011 and November 2013, with links to the web pages of those events;

(c) For the 2013–2015 review, it includes links to the pages of the first meeting of the structured expert dialogue, held in June 2013, and of the second meeting, held in November 2013.

35. The workshops and meetings section is regularly updated to add information on new events as it becomes available.

4. Knowledge resources

36. As mentioned in paragraph 31 above, the science web page features a section on external resources and a calendar of science-related events.

37. The external resources subsection[16] includes links to the IPCC website and the IPCC assessment reports, as well as a list of websites of research programmes and organizations, such as the International Geosphere–Biosphere Programme, the World Climate Research Programme, the International Human Dimensions Programme on Global Environmental Change, DIVERSITAS, the Inter-American Institute for Global Change Research, the Asia-Pacific Network for Global Change Research, START, the World Meteorological Organization, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the Global Climate Observing System and others.

38. The calendar of upcoming worldwide climate change science and research related events organized by external organizations,[17] including on issues related to systematic observation, is updated regularly.

B. Other online information tools relevant to climate science

39. In addition to the science web page, the UNFCCC website provides information on climate science in a non-technical way in the subsection on science under essential background. Furthermore, the UNFCCC disseminates information on climate science developments in plain language in its e-Newsletter and press releases. In addition, the secretariat has released an infographic on climate science as part of the web page dedicated to the 20th anniversary of the Convention.[18] These tools, which are very popular, as shown by the indication of traffic on the pages, contribute to the enhanced availability and visibility of scientific information relevant to the Convention, as they provide a means of communicating to a wide audience some of the latest developments in climate science.

1. Essential background web page

40. The subsection on science of the essential background section of the UNFCCC website,[19] titled "Feeling the Heat: Climate Science and the Basis of the Convention", describes the current state of scientific knowledge on climate science in layman's terms, on the basis of the latest IPCC findings. The information is organized according to the responses to three questions: Where are we now? How did we get here? And where are we going? (see figure 3).

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[16] <http://unfccc.int/7539.php>.

[17] Available at <http://unfccc.int/6562.php>.

[18] See the infographics "Science Underpins Climate Action" and "Reality Check", available at <http://unfccc.int/timeline/#infographics>.

[19] <http://unfccc.int/6064.php>.

41. The web page also provides links to the IPCC impacts map, which details projected climate change impacts by region. It also features sections on: essential links, with links to the IPCC website and the web pages of the SBSTA; the activities of the UNEP Office of the Chief Scientist; and the impacts of climate change on sustainable development achievements, with links to the websites on the United Nations Millennium Development Goals and the Post-2015 Development Agenda.

42. The science web page under the essential background section received 1,963 hits in March 2014 and peaked at 2,236 hits in November 2013, coinciding with COP 19.

Figure 3

Screenshot of the background web page on science

2. The UNFCCC e-Newsletter, press releases and other tools

43. The UNFCCC e-Newsletter[20] is distributed four to five times per year and provides a comprehensive overview of major news and announcements, along with practical information on upcoming events. All editions of the newsletter, apart from those dedicated to the Momentum for Change initiative, include a section on climate science, which provides a snapshot of the latest findings on the state of the climate. For example, the March 2014 edition of the e-Newsletter featured an article on the discussions between Parties and experts during COP 19 in Warsaw, Poland, of the findings of the contribution of Working Group I to the IPCC Fifth Assessment Report, *Climate Change 2013: The Physical Science Basis*.[21] That edition of the e-Newsletter was accessed 9,490 times.

[20] Available at <http://unfccc.int/3642.php>.

[21] Available at <http://www.climatechange2013.org>.

44. In addition, the secretariat issues press releases on a regular basis, which figure prominently on the home page of the UNFCCC website.[22] The releases can address climate science related issues, which are explained in non-technical terms.

45. On the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the Convention, the secretariat published a dedicated web page containing a timeline, interviews and infographics in relation to the Convention. One of the infographics is titled "Science Underpins Climate Action" and provides a snapshot of the key scientific facts related to climate change and policy response.[23]

C. Possible next steps

46. The review of the traffic on the various pages of the UNFCCC website that address climate science shows that the redesign of the science web page has had a limited effect on the number of visitors. Similar to the UNFCCC website in general, the web pages receive the greatest amount of traffic around and during the sessional periods of the year. Furthermore, the statistics indicate that scientific information reaches a wider audience when disseminated through the UNFCCC e-Newsletter than when displayed on the regular web pages dedicated to science.

47. Given these findings, the availability and visibility of science information on the UNFCCC website could be further enhanced. To that end, some possible approaches and tools include:

(a) Enhanced use of social media, such as Twitter and Facebook, using Adaptation Exchange[24] or a Facebook page dedicated to science;

(b) A tool to encourage stakeholder engagement;

(c) A dedicated newsletter or eUpdate on climate science;

(d) A climate science calendar;

(e) Better integration with scientific information available on the Internet from the IPCC and other relevant stakeholders.

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[22] <http://unfccc.int/2860.php>.

[23] Available at <http://unfccc.int/timeline/#infographics>.

[24] <https://www.facebook.com/The.Adaptation.Exchange>.